

New Hampshire Special Education Monitoring and Improvement Process

September 2000 through May 2001

Final Report **June 4, 2001**

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Introduction

The Concord School District conducted a year long comprehensive study and analysis of its special education programs through the New Hampshire Department of Education's *Special Education Monitoring and Improvement Process*. A team of individuals representing school district employees including administrators, special education coordinators, general and special education teachers, parents, students, school board members, community representatives, a group facilitator and technical adviser from SERESC (Southeastern Regional Education Service Center, Inc.) was formed to conduct this year long district-wide study. The team was named the "IDEA Team" to reflect the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Act. The IDEA Team's goal was to complete a thorough analysis of the District's philosophy of inclusion adopted by the Pupil Personnel Services School Board Subcommittee on (1) May 1, 1990, and to assess the school district's strengths and weaknesses with regard to special education services by answering the following focus questions:

- **What are our beliefs relative to the education of students with disabilities?**
- **Is our resource allocation consistent with this philosophy?**
- **Has this model resulted in successful outcomes for students?**
- **What are we doing well?**
- **Where do we need to improve?**

In order to answer these questions, the IDEA team divided into four (4) subcommittees: surveys, case studies, data and "other." The role of the subcommittees was to gather information and data from the following constituency groups: staff, parents, students (current and graduates), community and business members. This study was conducted from September 2000 through May 2001 with meetings scheduled regularly throughout the year.

(1) Concord School District Philosophy of Inclusion: The District believes that each child can learn and is capable of living, working, and recreating in the community. In order to implement this philosophy for students with disabilities, the following goals are set forth:

- The primary placement of a student should be in an instructional setting in a regular classroom appropriate to the student's chronological age group in a district school with remedial and support services as necessary, unless the student's educational needs require temporary placement outside the regular class environment.
- The development, implementation and review of Individual Educational Plans (IEP) should be a collaborative effort between school, parents, and students and when appropriate, community agencies.
- IEP goals and objectives should reflect current and future functioning in integrated educational, community and vocational setting.

IDEA Participants September, 2000

Ed Barnwell
Principal,
Dame

Sue Gamache
Classroom Teacher
RMS

Donna Palley
SPED Coord.
CSD

Heather Barker
Sped Coordinator
RMS

Roy Gerstenberger
Executive Director
Community Bridges

Nancy Pender
SPED Teacher
Dame

Linda Becker
Classroom Teacher
Kimball

Brenda Hastings
Classroom Teacher
Broken Ground

Rob Prohl
Asst. Supt.
CSD

Patty Bushey
SPED Teacher
CHS

Eric Hastings
Parent
CHS

Fred Richardson
Psychologist
Riverbend

Clint Cogswell
Principal
Walker School

Maryclare Heffernan
Technical Advisor
SERESC

Anne Riley
Facilitator

Mary P. Davidson
Parent
RMS

Barbara Hemingway
PreSchool Coord.
Eastman School

Pam Smith
Parent/Board
CHS/CSD

Tiffany Delisi
Student
CHS

Pam Jarvis
Counselor
RMS

Marin Stein
Student
CHS

Bill Dinan
Psychologist
CSD

Sandi Keyes
SPED Teacher
RMS

Anna Uhlig
Parent
Conant

Cheryl Dolin
LD Specialist

Susan Lauze
SPED Coord.

Paul Uhlig, MD
Parent

Beaver Meadow

CHS

Conant

Barb Franzeim
Counselor
Walker/Rumford

Sue Noyes
Asst. Principal
CHS

Anne Wilkinson
SPED Coord./
LD Specialist
Conant

Idea Team Sub-Committees
2000-2001

Case Studies:

Ed Barnwell
Heather Barker
Pam Jarvis
Sue Lauze
Donna Palley

Surveys:

Linda Becker
Patty Bushey
Mary Davidson
Cheryl Dolin
Barbara Hemingway
Nancy Pender

Data:

Clint Cogswell
Bill Dinan
Sue Gamache
Sue Noyes
Anne Wilkinson

Other:

Barbara Franzeim
Eric Hastings
Sandi Keyes
Rob Prohl
Pam Smith
Anna Uhlig
Paul Uhlig

Facilitator:

Anne Riley

Technical Advisor:

Maryclare Heffernan

**Meeting Dates
IDEA Team**

October, 2000	Oct. 4 and Oct. 18	Focus question defined Subcommittees formed Select monitoring option Complete and submit focus organizer and timeline of activities (due Oct. 30)
November, 2000	Nov. 1 and Nov. 15	Gather data
December, 2000	Dec. 6	Gather data
January, 2001	Jan. 17	Gather data
February, 2001	Feb. 7 and Feb. 21	Compile and analyze data
March, 2001	March 7 and March 21	Analyze data
April, 2001	April 4 and April 18	Subcommittee reports
May, 2001	May 2	Subcommittee reports
	May 10	All day retreat Final report written Due May 30, 2001 to SERESC
June 4, 2001		Report to School Board

Overview of Subcommittee Work

For the purpose of uniformity, the four (4) subcommittees divided the district's student population into groupings by grade levels: preK-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12, and graduates. Copies of each subcommittee's report are on file at the district central office.

Case Studies:

In order to answer the focus questions, the case study committee determined that it was critical to examine student performance in the District's special education programs. To do this, a complete longitudinal file review was conducted to gather this information. This committee identified nineteen (19) students across grade level groupings and disabilities, and reviewed each child's special education and cumulative files using an outline developed by the committee. In addition, parents of these students were interviewed to determine the level of parent satisfaction with special education services. Thirteen (13) out of the nineteen (19) were successfully contacted and questioned using a standardized interview format. Eight (8) middle and high school students were also interviewed using a standardized format.

Survey Committee:

This committee developed three (3) different surveys for staff, parents, and students to gather information to address the focus questions. All Concord School District Staff including administrators, general and special education teachers, specialists, and teaching assistants were asked to complete a four-page survey. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the staff responded. Surveys were mailed to all parents with a child identified with an educational disability. Thirty-one percent (31%) of parents returned a completed survey. All Rundlett Middle and Concord High School students with disabilities were provided the opportunity to complete a two-page student survey with support as needed. Forty-four percent (44%) of the middle school students and sixty-six percent (66%) of the high school students responded.

Data Committee:

The Data committee developed a questionnaire for special educators, psychologists, reading specialists, and school counselors to gather information related to job responsibilities and expectations with a forty percent (40%) response rate. This committee also analyzed information pertaining to district coding rates, out of district placements, graduation and dropout rates, and special education budget information. Preliminary data was collected comparing special and general education students in the areas of attendance, state assessment test scores (NHEIAP), and Reading Recovery participation.

“Other” Committee:

This committee used a variety of methods to gather information from students and the community at large. A community survey was developed and published in the local newspaper and on the district Web page to provide an opportunity for the general public to respond to a series of questions about special education. However, given the limited response to this survey (25 people), and questions raised about the survey questions, the IDEA team decided not to include any findings from this survey in this final report.

A professional and business survey was mailed to sixty-seven (67) individuals or businesses that have a relationship with the district to ascertain satisfaction with district special education services. Thirty percent (30%) responded to this survey.

An essay was designed with the district’s Peaceable Community Project to elicit students’ beliefs and experiences with students with disabilities. Students in kindergarten through eighth grade submitted 323 essays and drawings.

The committee also conducted interviews with young adults in the community who received special education services in the past to assess their transition to the adult world and to obtain suggestions for improvement.

Patterns and Trends

Initially, each subcommittee looked for specific patterns and trends to answer the focus questions and reported their findings to the IDEA team. The IDEA team then analyzed this information along with compliance data and the following patterns and trends surfaced across the subcommittees:

What are our beliefs relative to education of students with disabilities?

- There is general knowledge and acceptance by staff, parents, students and the professional community of the districts' philosophy and practice of inclusion
- Students with disabilities feel accepted within their school community
- Students with disabilities are placed in general education settings
- A few staff members and parents question the appropriateness of some special education placements.

Is our resource allocation consistent with our philosophy?

In order to answer this focus question, resource allocation is defined as special education staff (teachers, specialists, and assistants), instructional materials and equipment, time (for direct teaching, case management, and consultation), in-service training and technology.

- There is a broad array and continuum of special education services and/or programs
- Students, parents, and administrators report satisfaction with current resource allocation as defined above
- There is a need for in-service training for general education teachers and teaching assistants related to understanding and knowledge of specific disabilities, classroom modifications, and instructional practices
- Staff, parents and outside professionals report there is not enough consultation/collaboration time between general and special education staff
- Professional staff and teaching assistants report a need for more equitable resource allocation.

Has this model resulted in successful outcomes for students?

- Staff, administration, parent, and student responses indicate that students with disabilities are included in all aspects of the school community
- Parents express satisfaction with the services their children receive
- Graduates interviewed reported feeling prepared for life after high school and have the skills necessary for today's workplace, and/or post secondary education
- NHEIAP scores over time reflect students with disabilities make similar gains as students without disabilities
- Student essays indicate positive experiences and an understanding of students with disabilities.

What are we doing well?

- Parents report being active participants in the special education process: identification, assessment, IEP development, placement and monitoring
- Parents report they are well informed of their child's program, services and progress
- Students with disabilities feel welcome within the school community
- Staff are knowledgeable, professional, dedicated, flexible and hard working
- Special education staff has positive expectations for students
- A clear continuum of program options with an array of services is available
- Administration and special education coordinators are supportive of special education programs
- Staff recognize the importance of collaboration
- Students are prepared for life after high school
- Staff follow procedures and special education process well
- Parents and students express satisfaction with services
- Technology (equipment, materials and supplies) is available.

The New Hampshire Department of Education On Site Compliance Team made the following commendations:

- Excellent school climate
- Strong parental involvement
- Programs and services support an inclusionary model
- Programs and services are individualized to meet student needs
- Differences of opinion are resolved amicably
- Strong team approach to meeting student needs
- Staff development, particularly strand format, is noteworthy.

Where do we need to improve?

The results of this study indicate the following:

- Provide ongoing in-service training for all staff
- Allocate time for effective collaboration and consultation
- Improve measurement for record keeping, reporting and tracking student performance and progress
- Resolve the inconsistency parents report regarding the effectiveness of communication between home and school, and among general and special education staff
- Review current resource allocation and how resources are used
- Create a more uniform method to collect and access student data
- Write realistic, specific and measurable Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives
- Assure implementation of IEP's including modifications, provisions for adapting materials and instruction in general education settings
- Improve yearly transitions for students with disabilities.

Summary of Compliance Findings

Every three (3) years the New Hampshire Board of Education monitors special education programs within individual school districts. In addition to the self-study conducted by Concord's IDEA Team, the New Hampshire Department of Education On-Site Compliance Team spent three (3) days in April throughout the District's eleven (11) schools conducting interviews, reviewing files and observing students in general and special education settings. A summary of the citations noted during the file review along with commendations and recommendations was reported to school district personnel and is available on file in the district central office.

The District's Special Education Management team will address the citations pertaining to procedural safeguards, written prior notice, paperwork omissions, and implement a Compliance Corrective Action Plan. Specific commendations reported by the Compliance team include: strong administrative, parental, and team support; excellent staff; programs and services reflect an inclusionary model; technology; involvement of high school students in IEP meetings; and excellent school climate. Specific recommendations include: increased involvement of teaching assistants and middle school students at IEP meetings; and review high school graduation requirements for students with educational disabilities.

Improvement Plan

"The Top Five"

The IDEA Team met on May 11, 2001 for a full day retreat. Once the information from the subcommittees was gathered and summarized, the team looked at the patterns and trends that were reflected throughout the different committees' data. The team prioritized the following areas of need:

- Review the resource allocation of the following: education staff (teachers, specialists, and assistants), instructional materials and equipment, time (for direct teaching, case management, and consultation), in-service training, and current use of technology
- Improve collaboration by providing all staff with the necessary skills and by allocating time for collaboration
- Refine the assessment of student performance: measurement, tracking, benchmarking, and reporting of student progress
- Improve the writing and implementation of IEP's to reflect the specific needs of each individual student: appropriate modifications and accommodations, adapting classroom materials, and differentiating instruction
- Ensure the on-going in-service training for all staff related to better understanding of specific disabilities, instructional modifications and practices, and how to best teach special education students in general education settings.

On June 4, 2001, the results from this study will be presented to the School Board with commendations for strengths and recommendations for program improvements. This summer, the Concord School District's Best Schools Leadership Team will review the findings of the report, along with other data sources from district initiatives, to develop a strategic plan for improved student learning and outcomes.